over the strengths and weaknesses of Kantianism, utilitarianism, social contract theory and relativism. We then took up topical moral issues such as abortion, censorship, capital punishment, world hunger and affirmative action. Naturally, I felt it my job to present careful and well-argued positions on all sides of these popular issues. But this atmosphere of argument and counter-

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argument was reinforcing the idea that all moral questions have at least two sides, i.e., that all of ethics is controversial.

Perhaps this reaction is to be expected in any ethics course primarily devoted to issues on which it is natural to have a wide range of disagreement. In a course specifically devoted to dilemmas and hard cases, it is almost impossible not to give the student the impression that ethics itself has no solid foundation.

The "plain moral facts"

The relevant distinction here is between "basic" ethics and "dilemma" ethics. It is basic ethics that G.J. Warnock has in mind when he warns his fellow moral philosophers not to be bullied out of holding fast to the "plain moral facts." Because the typical course in applied ethics concentrates on problems and dilemmas, the students may easily lose sight of the fact that some things are clearly right and some are clearly wrong, that some ethical truths are not subject to serious debate.

I recently said something to this effect during a television interview in Boston, and the skeptical interviewer immediately asked me to name some uncontroversial ethical truths. After stammering for a moment, I found myself rattling off several that I hold to be uncontroversial:

> It is wrong to mistreat a child, to humiliate someone, to torment an animal. To think only of yourself, to steal, to lie, to break promises. And on the positive side: it is right to be considerate and respectful of others, to be charitable and generous.

Reflecting again that extemporaneous response, I am aware that not everyone will agree that all of these are plain moral facts. But teachers of ethics are free to give their own list or to pare down mine. In teaching ethics, one thing should be made central and prominent: right and wrong do exist. This should be laid down as uncontroversial lest one leaves an altogether false impression that everything is up for grabs.

It will, I think, be granted that the average student today does not come to college steeped in a religious or ethical tradition in which he or she has uncritical confidence. In the atmosphere of a course dealing with hard and controversial cases, the contemporary student may easily find the very idea of a stable moral tradition to be an archaic illusion. I am suggesting that we may have some responsibility here for providing the student with what the philosopher Henry Sidgwick called "moral common sense." (Sometimes he spoke of "established morality" as it is commonly understood and accepted.) More generally, I am suggesting that we should assess some of the courses we teach for their edificatory effect. Our responsibility as teachers goes beyond purveying information about the leading ethical theories and in developing dialectical skill in moral casuistry. I have come to see that dilemma ethics is especially lacking in edificatory force, and indeed that it may even be a significant factor in encouraging a superficial moral relativism or agnosticism.

I shall not really argue the case for seeing responsibility of the teacher of ethics in traditional terms. It would seem to me that the burden of argument is on those who would maintain that modern teachers of ethics should abjure the teacher's traditional concern with edification. Moreover, it seems to me that the hands-off posture is not really as neutral as it professes to be. (Author Samuel Blumenfeld is even firmer on this point. He says, "You have to be dead to be value neutral.") One could also make a case that the new attitude of disowning responsibility probably contributes to the student's belief in the false, and debilitating doctrine that there are no "plain moral facts" after all. In tacitly or explicitly promoting that doctrine the teacher contributes to the student's lack of confidence in a moral life that could be grounded in something more than personal disposition or political fashion. I am convinced that we could be doing a far better job of moral education.

The philosophy of virtue

If one accepts the idea that moral edification is not an improper *desideratum* in the teaching of ethics, then the question arises: What sort of course in ethics is effective? What ethical teachings are naturally edificatory? My own experience leads me to recommend a course on the philosophy of virtue. Here, Aristotle is the best place to begin. Philosophers as diverse as Plato, Augustine, Kant and even Mill wrote about vice and virtue. And there is an impressive contemporary literature on the subject. But the *locus classicus* is Aristotle.

Students find a great deal of plausibility in Aristotle's theory of moral education, as well as personal relevance in what he says about courage, generosity, temperance and other virtues. I have found that an exposure to Aristotle makes an immediate inroad on dogmatic relativism; indeed the tendency to dismiss morality as relative to taste or social fashion rapidly diminishes and may vanish altogether. Most students find the idea of developing virtuous character traits naturally appealing.

Once the student becomes engaged with the problem of what kind of person to be, and how to become that kind of person, the

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problems of ethics become concrete and practical and, for many a student, morality itself is thereafter looked on as a natural and even inescapable personal undertaking. I have not come across students who have taken a course in the philosophy of virtue saying that they have learned there is no such thing as morality. The writings of Aristotle and of other philosophers of virtue are full of argument and controversy, but students who read them with care are not tempted to say they learned "there is no right or wrong, only good or bad arguments."

At the elementary and secondary level students may be too young to study the philosophy of virtue, but they certainly are capable of reading stories and biographies about great men and women. Unfortunately, today's primary school teachers, many of whom are heavily influenced by what they were taught in trendy schools of education, make little use of the time-honored techniques of telling a story to young children and driving home "the moral of the story." What are they doing?

Values clarification: no right or wrong

One favored method of moral education that has been popular for the past twenty years is called Values Clarification, which maintains the principle that the teacher should never directly tell students about right and wrong; instead the students must be left to discover "values" on their own. One favored values clarification technique is to ask children about their likes and dislikes: to help them become acquainted with their personal preferences. The teacher asks the students, "How do you feel about homemade birthday presents? Do you like wall-to-wall carpeting? What is your favorite color? Which flavor of ice cream do you prefer? How do you feel about hit-and-run drivers? What are your feelings on the abortion question?" The reaction to these

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questions—from wall-to-wall carpeting to hit-and-run drivers—is elicited from the student in the same tone of voice–as if one's personal preferences in both instances are all that matters.

One of my favorite anecdotes concerns a teacher in Newton, Massachusetts, who had attended numerous values clarification workshops and was assiduously applying its techniques in her class. The day came when her class of sixth graders announced that they valued cheating and wanted to be free to do it on their tests. The teacher was very uncomfortable. Her solution? She told the children that since it was her class and since she was opposed to cheating, they were not free to cheat. "In my class you must be honest, for I value honesty. In other areas of your life you may be free to cheat."

Now this fine and sincere young woman was doing her best not to indoctrinate her students. But what she was telling them is that cheating is not wrong if you can get away with it. Good values are "what one values." She valued the norm of not cheating. That made this value binding on her; and gave her the moral authority to enforce it in her classroom; others including the students, were free to choose other values "elsewhere." The teacher thought she had no right to intrude by giving the students moral direction; of course, the price for her failure to do her job of inculcating moral principles is going to be paid by her bewildered students. They are being denied a structured way to develop values. Their teacher is not about to give it to them lest she interfere with their freedom to work out their own value systems.

Preferences over principles

This Massachusetts teacher values honesty, but her educational theory does not allow her the freedom to take a strong stand on honesty as a moral principle. Her training has led her to treat her "preference" for honesty as she treats her preference for vanilla over chocolate flavored ice cream. It is not hard to see how this doctrine is an egotistic variant of ethical relativism. For most ethical relativists, public opinion is the final court of ethical appeal; for the proponent of values clarification, the locus of moral authority is to be found in the individual's private tastes and preferences.

How sad that so many teachers feel intellectually and "morally" unable to justify their own belief that cheating is wrong. It is obvious that our schools must have clear behavior codes and high expectations for their students. Civility, honesty and considerate behavior must be recognized, encouraged and rewarded. That means that moral education must have as its explicit aim the moral betterment of the student. If that be indoctrination, so be it. How can we hope to equip the students to face the challenge of moral responsibility in their lives if we studiously avoid telling them what is right and what is wrong?

The elementary schools of Amherst, New York, provide good examples of an unabashedly directive moral education. Posters are placed around the school extolling kindness and helpfulness. Good behavior in the cafeteria is rewarded by being able to sit at a "high table" with a tablecloth and flowers. One kindergarten student was given a special award for having taken a new Korean student under her wing. But such simple and reasonable methods as those practiced in Amherst, New York, are rare. Many school systems have given up entirely the task of character education. Children are left to fend for themselves. To my mind, leaving children alone to discover their own values is a little like putting them in a chemistry lab and saying, "Discover your own compounds, kids." If they blow themselves up at least they have engaged in an authentic search for the self.

Can there be genuine moral education?

Ah, you may say, we do not let children fend for themselves in chemistry laboratories because we have knowledge about the chemicals. But is there really such thing as moral knowledge? The reply to that is an emphatic "Yes." Have we not learned a thing or two over the past several thousand years of civilization? To pretend we know nothing about basic decency, about human rights, about vice and virtue, is fatuous or disingenuous. Of course we know that gratuitous cruelty and political repression are wrong, that kindness and political freedom are right and good. Why should we be the first society in history that finds itself hamstrung in the vital task of passing along its moral tradition to the next generation?

Some opponents of directive moral education argue that it could be a form of brainwashing. That is a pernicious confusion. To brainwash is to diminish someone's capacity for reasoned judgment. It is perversely misleading to say that helping children to develop habits of truth telling or fair play threatens their ability to make reasoned choices. Quite the contrary: good moral habits

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enhance one's capacity for rational judgments.

The paralyzing fear of indoctrinating children is even greater in high schools than it is in elementary schools. One favored teaching technique, allegedly avoiding indoctrination, is dilemmas ethics. Children are presented with abstract moral dilemmas: Seven people are in a lifeboat with provisions for four—what should they do? Or Lawrence Kohlberg's famous case of Heinz and the stolen drug. Should the indigent Heinz, whose dying wife needs medicine, steal it? When high school students study ethics at all, it is usually in the form of pondering such dilemmas or in the form of debates on social issues: abortion, euthanasia, capital punishment and the like. Directive moral education is out of favor. Storytelling is out of fashion.

Let's consider for a moment just how the current fashion in dilemmas differs from the older approach to moral education which often used moral tales and parables to instill moral principles in students in the primary grades. Saul Bellow asserts that the survival of Jewish culture would be inconceivable without the stories that gave point and meaning to the Jewish moral tradition. One such story included in a collection of traditional Jewish tales that Bellow edited, is called "If Not Higher." I sketch it here to contrast the story approach with the